

Washington - Congresswoman Linda Sánchez today introduced legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives that would equip schools with the resources they need to prevent school bullying and harassment. The Safe Schools Improvement Act would give students a safe learning environment and reduce the nation's growing drop-out rate.

"Bullying is not a harmless rite of passage for children," said Rep. Sánchez, a Member of the House Committee on Education and Labor. "Three-quarters of all school shooting incidents have been linked to bullying and harassment, and victims of bullying and harassment are more likely to be depressed or suicidal.

"This is a problem we can and should fix," added Rep. Sánchez.

Research has also shown that bullying and harassment are serious problems that impede students' academic progress and overall mental health. Studies have found that nearly one-third of all students are bullied at least once a month and that one out of every ten high school drop-outs left school because of repeated bullying.

The Safe Schools Improvement Act would amend the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act to include specific provisions to prevent bullying and harassment. It would require states and districts to include information regarding the prevalence of bullying and harassment in schools as part of the needs assessments they are already required to complete. Inclusion of this data will help ensure that schools and districts are properly equipped to handle bullying and harassment. In addition, the Safe Schools Improvement Act would require every school to include policies to address bullying and harassment in their codes of conduct.

This bill, which may be included as part of legislation to reauthorize the No Child Left Behind Act, also defines the terms "bullying" and "harassment" to include them in the broad definition of school violence.

A broad range of educational and non-educational organizations has expressed support for the Safe Schools Improvement Act, including the American Library Association; the National PTA; the American Federation of Teachers; Big Brothers Big Sisters of America; the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network; the National Council of La Raza; and the Human Rights Campaign.